



News Release

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Sudden spike in pesticide-related illnesses concerns state health officials

OLYMPIA —There have been 15 potential pesticide drift events resulting in about 60 people getting ill reported to the Washington State Department of Health in the past two months— that’s as many the agency normally sees in a year.

Since March, the department has received reports that people, primarily orchard workers, have reported getting sick due to exposure to pesticides after what is known as a “drift event.” Drift events can happen when pesticide spray drifts away from its intended area because of wind, or the person spraying isn’t aware that people are in the area.

The Department of Health has asked the Department of Agriculture, WSU Cooperative Extension, and the Farm Bureau for help in notifying licensed pesticide applicators about the problem. Applicators that violate the law can face a range of actions based on the circumstances that are enforced by the departments of Agriculture and Labor and Industries.

“We’re concerned with this spike in potential drift exposures and are calling our partner agencies to work with pesticide applicators on following state and federal rules to prevent drift,” said Kathy Lofy, state health officer. “Protecting people from unnecessary exposure to these chemicals is a responsibility that needs to be taken seriously.”

Most agricultural pesticide labels prohibit application that will contact workers or other people either directly or through drift. All of the recent instances of pesticide drift have occurred in Eastern Washington: Adams, Benton, Chelan, Douglas, Franklin, Grant, and Yakima counties — the region of the state where there are many orchards.

Pesticide investigators from the Department of Health examine each potential case of pesticide illness to identify common risk factors and confirm the specific pesticide involved. Determining

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the exact pesticide a person was exposed to can assist a health care provider in determining the correct course of medical treatments to resolve the symptoms being experienced. The cases reported in the last month have mostly involved sprays that are typically applied before orchard trees have developed their leaves for the year.

The [type of illness or injury a person may have after a pesticide exposure](#) varies based on type of chemicals being used, the amount and way in which a person is exposed and a person's health. Symptoms reported have included eye and respiratory irritation, skin irritation and rashes, headache, nausea, and vomiting.

More information about [pesticides and your health](#) is online on the [Department of Health website](#). You can also find out how to report pesticide misuse as well as information on pesticide-use enforcement online at the [Washington State Department of Agriculture](#).

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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